



IPH response to:

Department of Housing, Planning,  
Community and Local Government

Ireland 2040 Our Plan

National Planning Framework

31 March 2017

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## The Institute of Public Health in Ireland

The remit of the Institute of Public Health in Ireland (IPH) is to promote cooperation for public health between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland in the areas of research and information, capacity building and policy advice. Our approach is to support the Departments of Health and their agencies in both jurisdictions and maximise the benefits of all-island cooperation to achieve practical benefits for people in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

Our interest in this area focuses on the potential impacts of planning and development on public health and on health inequalities. Our published work which can be found at [www.publichealth.ie](http://www.publichealth.ie) includes reports and consultation responses across a broad range of issues relevant to spatial planning such as travel and transport, alcohol availability, positive ageing and environmental regulation.

IPH welcomes the opportunity to respond to this consultation. We welcome the recognition within the Issues and Choices paper of the influences that planning and development have on improving health and wellbeing and reducing health inequalities.

We believe that health starts where people live, learn, work and play and that planning for services and environments which address these wider determinants of health is an essential part of preventing illness and premature death and improving quality of life.

The National Planning Framework provides an opportunity to initiate a more health-oriented spatial planning approach. To support this, our response is principally focused on issues we feel need to be taken into consideration to maximise health and wellbeing opportunities within the NPF.

## Key points

Spatial planning policy impacts on health in many ways; the National Planning Framework has a pivotal role to play in ensuring that the health and wellbeing of people across Ireland are central to future development.

IPH would welcome a requirement under the National Planning Framework for regional and local planning authorities to work with public health leads and health organisations to help ensure planning processes take into account opportunities and barriers to improving health and wellbeing and creating healthier communities.

The National Planning Framework provides an opportunity to address the impact of the physical environment on obesity through three domains: Facilities for physical activity; Land use and transport policy and practice and; A food environment that supports access to healthy, fresh and nutritious foods.

As well as the broad physical activity measures needed to tackle the obesogenic environment, the National Planning Framework provides an opportunity to consider actions at national and local authority level with regard to incorporating physical activity into planning, development and design of the built and natural environments.

IPH recommends that the National Planning Framework commits to playing its part in achieving the goals of government policy on reducing alcohol-related harm.

IPH welcomes the recognition in the National Planning Framework of the links between health and wellbeing and place but calls for a more holistic approach whereby positive mental health is integrated throughout the Framework.

The National Planning Framework should broaden its recognition of the role of spatial planning in supporting population health and wellbeing. Policies and priorities for action within the NPF should articulate health objectives in a holistic and coherent way. Moreover potential health impacts of policies should be routinely conducted using robust and appropriate evidence and approaches.

Future planning policies should recognise and address the potential health impacts of land use and community design in an integrated way. While there is growing recognition of the benefits of active travel in helping to achieve goals across a range of sectors including health, environment and transport, the mismatch between economic, transport and housing policy has created unhealthy and unsustainable patterns of car dependency for a significant proportion of the population.

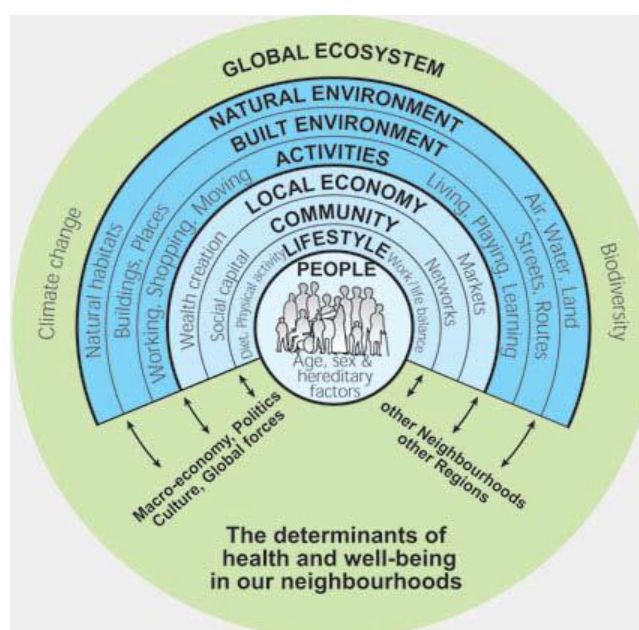
The National Planning Framework presents an opportunity to contribute to changes in the social as well as physical environment by improving the liveability of streets and neighbourhoods. IPH recommends that future planning policies to protect, enhance and maintain both the natural and built environment consider and include the added value to health of such policies.

IPH calls for greater recognition of the distributional impacts of planning policies on the health of different groups within the population.

IPH welcomes the proposal within the National Planning Framework of an interdependent approach between rural and urban areas and agree for the need to balance development with the protection of the natural and built environment.

## Why public health matters for spatial planning

Health encompasses physical, mental and social domains and can be understood as a resource for everyday life. Barton & Grant's health map demonstrates the numerous ways in which health and wellbeing are determined and shaped by our built and natural environments.



Planning and public health share similar goals; to improve the way we live and our quality of life. Spatial planning aims to create and maintain places in which people want to live, work and invest while a social determinants of health approach recognises the fundamental importance of the conditions in which people are born, grow, work, live and age on health and wellbeing.

Specific health risks associated with spatial planning include heart disease, respiratory disease, mental ill-health, obesity and injuries. Decisions made regarding land use, community design and transportation affect these health risks in a variety of ways including through influencing air and water quality, traffic safety, opportunities for physical activity and social interactions as well as access to workplace, education, healthcare and other facilities and services such as food and alcohol outlets.

**Spatial planning policy impacts on health in many ways; the National Planning Framework has a pivotal role to play in ensuring that the health and wellbeing of people across Ireland are central to future development.**

What policies can the NPF include to effect improvements to our general health, including physical and mental wellbeing, in Ireland over the next twenty years?

## Address current and emerging public health priorities

Chronic conditions, such as cancer, cardiovascular disease, respiratory disease and diabetes are long-term, life-limiting conditions that account for three-quarters of all deaths in Ireland. Common risk factors include an unhealthy diet, physical inactivity, tobacco and harmful alcohol use.

38% of the adult population in Ireland report having at least one chronic condition rising to 54% amongst those aged 50 or older. Given that the number of people in Ireland aged 65+ is projected to almost double to around 1.1 million within the lifetime of this Plan, intersectoral action on modifiable risk factors is essential now to ease the burden on our health services in the future.

Three existing national public health policies are summarised below from the perspective of spatial planning. A further two issues for which policies are currently being developed – alcohol and mental health – are also included here.

### Healthy Ireland

Ireland's public health framework *Healthy Ireland* (2013-2025) takes a whole-of-Government and whole-of-society approach to improving health and wellbeing and the quality of people's lives. It aims to create an Irish society where everyone can enjoy physical and mental health, and where wellbeing is valued and supported at every level of society. Cross-sectoral and partnership working are core themes underpinning the framework. The National Planning Framework provides an opportunity to strengthen the inclusion of health within planning processes in Ireland. One action within *Healthy Ireland* is the development of integrated social impact assessment to facilitate systematic inclusion of health and wellbeing in policy development.

**IPH would welcome a requirement under the National Planning Framework for regional and local planning authorities to work with public health leads and health organisations to help ensure planning processes take into account opportunities and barriers to improving health and wellbeing and creating healthier communities.**

## A Healthy Weight for Ireland

The national obesity policy and action plan *A Healthy Weight for Ireland* (2016-2025) also recognises the need for a cross-sectoral approach in addressing rising levels of overweight and obesity. Currently, 60% of adults in Ireland and 75% of those aged 50 or older are overweight or obese.

**The National Planning Framework provides an opportunity to address the impact of the physical environment on obesity through three domains:**

- **Facilities for physical activity** such as parks, playgrounds, sports grounds and other recreational and outdoor spaces that promote active play and sports;
- **Land use and transport policy and practice that encourage active travel** including mixed land use, walkable neighbourhoods/street connectivity and access to public transport, footpaths and bicycle lanes and;
- **A food environment that supports access to healthy, fresh and nutritious foods** through retail planning, regulatory control and local food production.

## Get Ireland Active

The national physical activity plan *Get Ireland Active* recognises the role of natural and built spaces in providing a supportive environment for increasing physical activity levels. Being physically active every day is one of the most important steps that people of all ages can take to maintain and improve their health and wellbeing. However less than one third of adults in Ireland are meeting recommended levels of physical activity.

**As well as the broad physical activity measures needed to tackle the obesogenic environment, the National Planning Framework provides an opportunity to consider actions in *Get Ireland Active* at national and local authority level with regard to incorporating physical activity into planning, development and design of the built and natural environments.**

## Harmful use of alcohol

Reducing harmful levels of alcohol consumption and addressing alcohol-related harm are critical concerns under the Healthy Ireland agenda. Comprehensive reviews of alcohol policy interventions show that addressing alcohol availability is a central component of any successful approach to reducing alcohol-related harm. The Issues and Choices paper recognises that 'how we make places can have a huge influence on people's health and wellbeing'. This is particularly true in terms of the planning of the retail environment with regards to the sale and supply of alcohol. In particular, decisions made at national, regional

and local planning level regarding the granting of licenses for the sale of alcohol and the hours of sale are important.

Increased alcohol outlet density is associated with increased adult alcohol consumption, adolescent alcohol consumption, mortality and hospitalisations, crime, domestic violence and child abuse. Of particular concern is that when there are areas of very high alcohol-outlet density, these tend to compete on price, further enhancing the availability and accessibility of alcohol in the local area and contributing to urban decay. There is some evidence that urban regeneration in disadvantaged areas has been undermined by the tendency to fill commercial spaces with alcohol outlets selling cheap alcohol, despite the objections of local residents and communities.

**In light of the available evidence, IPH recommends that the National Planning Framework commits to playing its part in achieving the goals of government policy on reducing alcohol-related harm.**

### Mental health

Mental health is best understood as a matrix not simply as opposite ends of a single spectrum. People living with a mental health issue or condition can experience positive mental health, and an individual may experience poor or negative mental health without a mental health condition. In Ireland, 13% of the population aged 15 and above reported higher than average levels of positive mental health while 10% reported high levels of negative mental health in a recent survey.

Mental health, like physical health, is influenced by a broad range of factors including social, economic and environmental conditions. Issues of particular relevance to the National Planning Framework include quality of the built environment, green infrastructure and access to transport, jobs, housing and social networks. A lack or perceived lack of safety and security on the streets and issues such as density, noise and traffic are frequently cited as having negative impacts on individual and community mental health. Social isolation can be a contributing factor particularly in older age groups and for those in geographically isolated communities.

**IPH welcomes the recognition in the National Planning Framework of the links between health and wellbeing and place but calls for a more holistic approach whereby positive mental health is integrated throughout the Framework.**



# Are there key priorities the NPF can identify to ensure better or improved health and wellbeing of people and places in Ireland?

## Better policy integration

There is growing recognition of the value of policy coherence across government for economic, environmental and social goals. Tackling the social determinants of health at national, regional and local levels requires better policy cohesion across all government sectors.

The National Planning Framework should broaden its recognition of the role of spatial planning in supporting population health and wellbeing. Policies and priorities for action within the NPF should articulate health objectives in a holistic and coherent way. Moreover potential health impacts of policies should be routinely conducted using robust and appropriate evidence and approaches.

Current planning processes do not include an obligation to consider impacts on health which can lead to unintended and negative consequences. From an environmental impact assessment perspective there is a growing movement for health to be more routinely considered both at project and policy level. At local level, the reform of local government including the requirement for development of 5 year local economic and community plans provides an opportunity for better integration of health and wellbeing while the aim of the National Healthy Cities and Counties of Ireland Network is to help support and implement *Healthy Ireland* at local level.

## Health impacts of land use and transport policies

**Future planning policies should recognise and address the potential health impacts of land use and community design in an integrated way. While there is growing recognition of the benefits of active travel in helping to achieve goals across a range of sectors including health, environment and transport, the mismatch between economic, transport and housing policy has created unhealthy and unsustainable patterns of car dependency for a significant proportion of the population.**

The links between car dependency, urban sprawl and poor health are well documented. Proximity and accessibility to destinations affects transport choices and there is strong evidence that land use policies and zoning regulations that favour mixed use

developments support active travel choices. Planning policies that favour the provision of new homes within the existing built footprint can counteract further urban sprawl and enable more people to live in more compact, walkable neighbourhoods.

Reducing the volume of long distance commuting by enabling people to work close to where they live will have positive impacts on road safety and mental wellbeing. IPH supports a greater focus on encouraging and supporting active travel and public transport for commuting purposes within future planning policies. Choosing active forms of travel will bring about some immediate health benefits for individuals primarily through increasing their levels of physical activity as well as potentially benefiting mental health. Further health benefits occur as more people adopt active means of travel including those associated with cleaner air, less noise and increased road safety as well as increased social interaction and community cohesion. Conversely heavy reliance on car transport can impact negatively on health: the combined health impacts from road traffic injuries and transport related air pollution are responsible for a major contribution to morbidity and mortality. Traffic volume also affects social networks and limits children's sense of independence and personal mobility.

## Sustainable communities

The health and wellbeing of individuals is greatly affected by the communities in which they live and the nature of their physical environment. A key element of sustainable communities is access to good quality blue and green space as well as other open spaces where communities can gather and engage in shared activities. Health benefits include levels of physical activity, better mental health and greater community cohesion. **The National Planning Framework presents an opportunity to contribute to changes in the social as well as physical environment by improving the liveability of streets and neighbourhoods. IPH recommends that future planning policies to protect, enhance and maintain both the natural and built environment consider and include the added value to health of such policies.**

## Distributional impacts

**IPH calls for greater recognition of the distributional impacts of planning policies on the health of different groups within the population.** Health inequalities are preventable and unjust differences in health status experienced by certain population groups. People in lower socio-economic groups are more likely to experience chronic ill-health and die earlier than those who are more advantaged. Good planning can play an important role in

addressing the multiple negative environmental conditions that people living in deprived communities are exposed to.

Although older people are referenced in the strategy a greater recognition on the implications of an ageing population for spatial planning and infrastructure would be beneficial and critical to the attainment the goals of this strategy, Healthy Ireland and the National Positive Ageing Strategy. Data indicates the proportion of older people living across Ireland is not evenly distributed. Older people are less proportionally represented in the inner cores of our cities and are more proportionately likely to be found in suburbs and coastal towns as well as rural areas where assets and infrastructure tend to less well developed. Furthermore there are also significant concentrations of older people living in areas of high social deprivation across Ireland and in both urban and rural locations. Ageing in place is an important element in helping older people to live independently for as long as possible. However, making this a sustainable reality requires change in policies and practices in areas such as housing, transport, social inclusion and spatial planning.

## Rural development

A significant proportion of the population live in rural areas and within these areas lies significant deprivation. It is essential that development in urban areas does not further exclude or exacerbate existing inequalities for this population. **IPH welcomes the proposal within the National Planning Framework of an interdependent approach between rural and urban areas and agree for the need to balance development with the protection of the natural and built environment.**

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